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THE OPERATIONS OF 2D SQUADRON, 124TH CAVALRY
REGIMENT SPECIAL IN THE BATTLE OF KNIGHT'S HILL
29 JANUARY - 2 FEBRUARY 1945
(Personal Experience of a Squadron Commander)

Type of operation described: CAVALRY SQUADRON IN AN
ENVELOPMENT ATTACK IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

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29 JANUARY - 2 FEBRUARY 1945
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(Personal Experience of a Squadron Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This historical analysis covers the operations of the 2d Squadron, 124th Cavalry Special in the battle of Knight's Hill 29 January - 2 February 1945.

To orient the reader it is first necessary to consider briefly the sequence of events prior to the commitment of the Mars Task Force, of which the 2d Squadron, 124th Cavalry Special was a part.

Between December 1941 and February 1942, the Imperial Japanese Army conquered the Philippines, Thailand, the Dutch East Indies and threatened Burma. (1) For American strategy to be successful it was necessary then that China continue to engage a portion of Japan's south Asiatic flank. For this reason the Allies planned to hold Burma, which was China's only remaining effective bridge of contact with the outside world. (See Map A)

(2)

On 18 February 1942, Singapore fell and with it the entire Malayan defense cordon was gone. The front was pushed north rapidly by the onrushing Japanese. (See Map A) (3) In March 1942, General Stilwell assumed command of Allied forces. By mid-April 1942, the Japanese had pushed their attack through the dirt roads and jungle of Thailand and had hit the eastern flank of the Chinese lines at Loilem, destroying the Chinese 55th Division. (4) At the same time, the center of the Allied line at Yenangyaung collapsed and the 1st Burmese Division was forced back. The remaining British forces withdrew over the Chindwin River into India, and the Chinese forces withdrew north up the gorges of the Salween River. (See Map B)

(1) A-6, p. 143; (2) A-3, p. 29; (3) A-1, p. 313; (4) A-3, p. 88.

The combat efficiency of the Japanese forces was very high, as was demonstrated by the force and speed with which their attack split the hastily assembled British-Chinese Army at Loilem and Yenangyaung into several parts. Thus, Burma was added to Japan's conquest.

WEATHER AND TERRAIN

The Japanese victory in Burma gave them control of all communication routes and also control of operational areas least affected by the monsoon. The monsoon season in the Burma area (periods of heavy rainfall) ends in October and the weather is comparatively dry and cold until March or May, at which time the weather becomes unbearably hot and remains so until it is broken by the heavy rains which fall during the summer months. The weather, as well as the terrain, is an important factor to consider in military operations in Burma.

Burma is shaped like a hand and is an extension of the "Roof of the World", bounded on all sides by high mountains. As the hand divides into fingers, so Burma splits into ranges running southward. These ranges are high, steep, and abrupt. Between the ranges flow four large rivers, the Salween, the Sittang, the Irrawaddy, and the Chindwin. It is along the valleys formed by these rivers that all important communication routes are located. The Japanese believed that by controlling the coast line, rivers and roads of Burma, their forces could effectively block any major allied force; and the only way an attack could be launched against them would be from the south through the port of Rangoon. (See Map C)

After General Stilwell walked out of Burma he issued his classic statement which described what happened to the Allies in Burma: "I claim we got a hell of a beating. We got run out of Burma and it is humiliating as hell. I think we ought to find out what caused it, go back, and retake it." (5)

(5) A-3, p. 106.

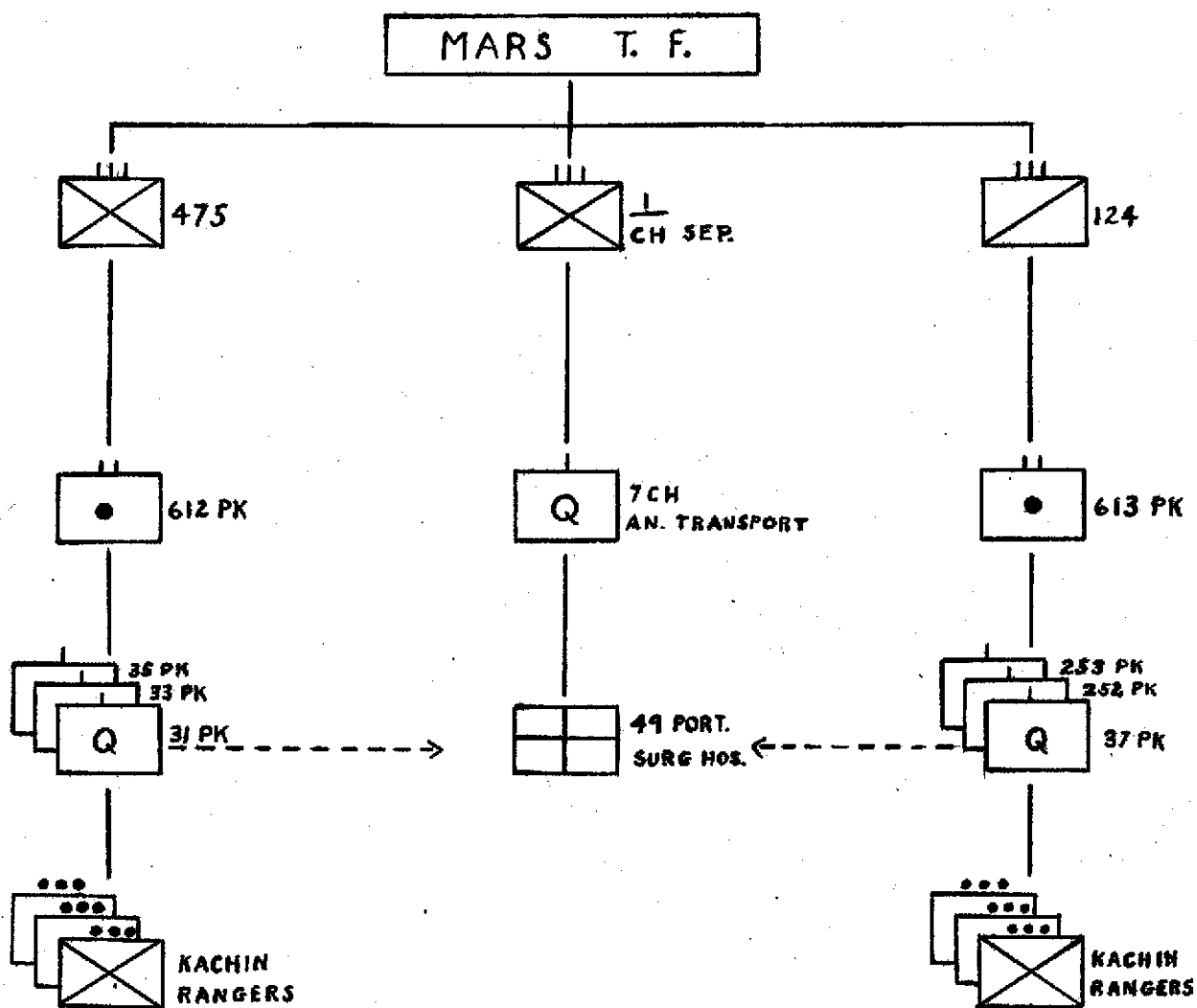
GENERAL PLAN

In 1944, under the Northern Combat Area Command, the British 36th Division, the Chinese 1st and 6th Armies, and Merrill's Marauders began their long trek back to Burma. The drive of these forces culminated in the capture of Myitkyina airfield on 17 May 1944, and the first phase of the Northern Burma campaign ended. In the south, the British 14th Army was ready at Imphal to drive eastward toward the plain above Mandalay. (See Map C)

NORTHERN COMBAT AREA COMMAND MISSION

The over-all mission of the NCAC was to capture Lashio, to secure the Stilwell Road, which had been built from Ledo, India to Myitkyina, Burma, and to insure an open land route to China. (6) To do this the British 36th Division was to advance south along the Myitkyina-Mandalay railway corridor. The Chinese 6th Army (22d and 50th Divisions) was to move south parallel to the British 36th Division; and the Chinese 1st Army (30th and 38th Divisions) was to move on the route Bhamo, Namkham, and Lashio. (See Map C) On 26 July 1944, General Order No. 85, HQ USAF was issued activating the 5332d Brigade (provisional), later to be known as the Mars Task Force. This force replaced Merrill's Marauders which was de-activated in August, 1944. (7)

The Mars Task Force was composed of the units and organization as shown on the following page.



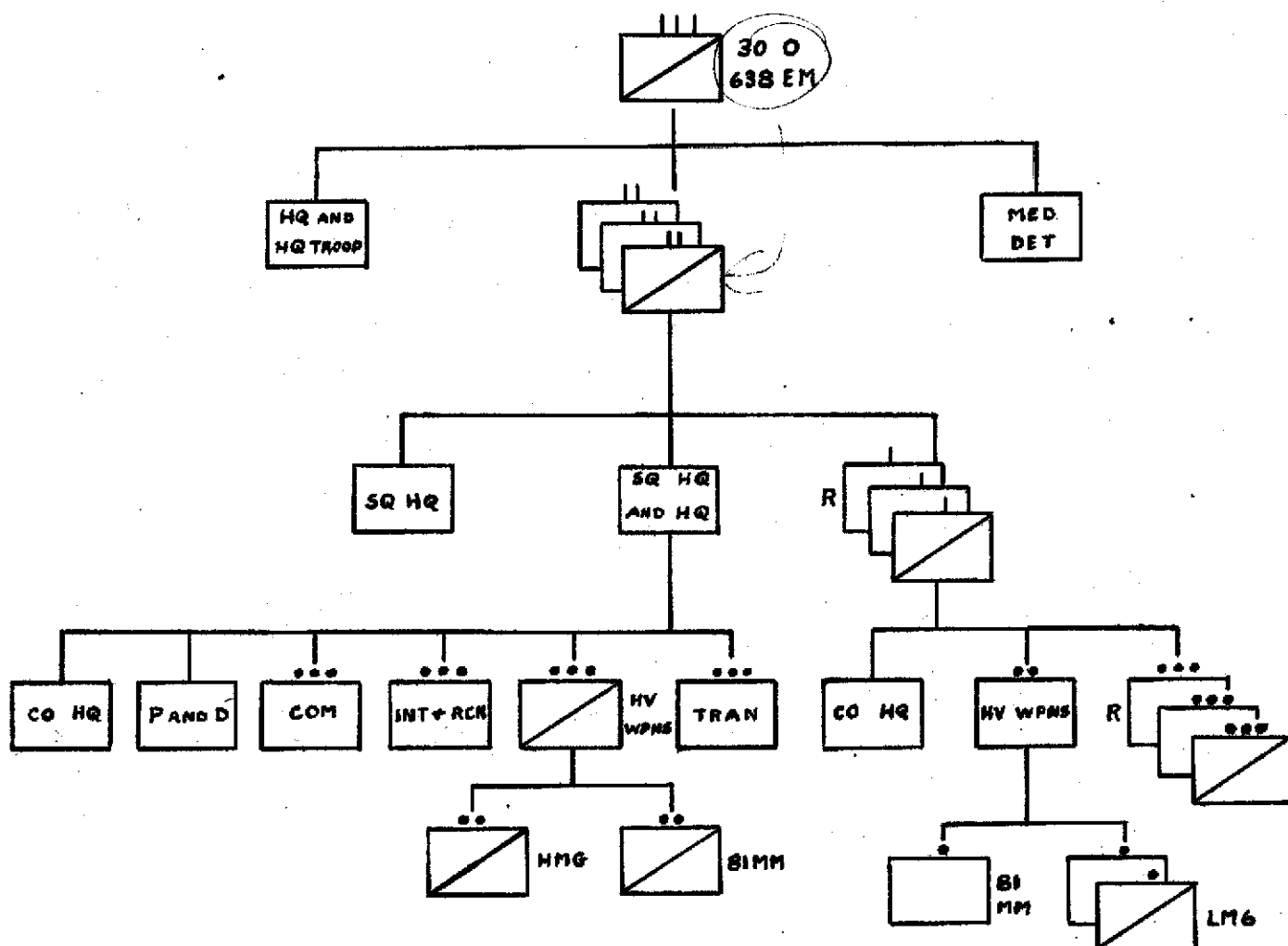
The Mars Task Force was organized to operate as a long range penetration unit. By definition, a long range penetration unit is a special task force organized with the specific mission of operating deep in the enemy rear in conjunction with larger units. The organization, as such, prevented utilization of normal methods of supply and necessitated that Class I and Class V supplies be air dropped. The forward troops were supplied by air from Dinjan, requiring an air turn-around of 600 miles. (See Map C) (8) March serials were of battalion or squadron size. They received supplies every three days. Class I supplies air-dropped during this operation consisted chiefly of C or K rations supplemented by fruit juices and peanuts. This type of supply required an highly efficient means of communication and also created other special problems, including evacuation of casualties. Evacuation had to be accomplished by liaison planes (L-5's) from air strips built by the using unit. Because of this situation, it was sometimes necessary either to evacuate casualties to the rear by mule or litter to an air strip, or to move them forward with their units. Hospitalization was jungle improvised, but the Medical Detachment did all that was possible until clearings could be made in which evacuation planes could land and take off.

In this particular operation, units of battalion size were given objectives such as hills or towns. Generally, no boundaries were assigned restricting maneuver because some units were operating well forward of the Chinese divisions who were pushing the Japanese forces into trail and road blocks which had been established by the long range penetration unit.

ORGANIZATION OF THE 124TH CAVALRY REGIMENT SPECIAL

The 124th Cavalry Regiment Special was re-organized by Memorandum Order dated 28 September 1944, into a Regimental Staff, Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, and three squadrons. The term "special" (8) A-5, p. 43.

was attached to the 124th Cavalry Regiment because its organization differed from that of a cavalry regiment. This organization can best be shown by the following chart.



Each squadron headquarters troop had an enlisted strength of 191 men and each rifle troop had a strength of 142 enlisted men. The 2d Squadron was authorized a strength of 30 officers and 638 enlisted men, but at no time did this squadron reach its authorized T/O strength. The 124th Cavalry Regiment Special was organized similarly to an infantry regiment, the main differences being that each rifle platoon was composed of three ten-men

squads and each rifle troop had a weapon section consisting of an 81-mm mortar squad and a light machine gun section. The heavy weapons platoon of squadron headquarters and headquarters troop was made up of a heavy machine gun section of four machine guns and an 81-mm mortar section of four 81-mm mortars. Mules were used for packing 81-mm mortars, machine guns, ammunition, kitchen packs, and radios. (9)

TRAINING FOR THE MISSION

MISSION
hasn't been
given yet

An intensive jungle training program, consisting of a series of attack problems from squad through squadron levels was carried on at Camp Landis, located eleven miles north of Myitkyina, Burma, during November and December of 1944. The training in this period emphasized establishment and detection of ambushes, jungle lore, physical conditioning, perimeter defense, and employment of platoons as security forces. During this period an "esprit de corps" was built up through a friendly competitive, cooperative spirit among units in all phases of training; and special emphasis was placed on physical training. At the completion of this training period, all men were hardened, confident, and ready for combat. Their morale was very high as a result of this thorough training and confidence in their leaders. (10)

THE MARCH TO MONG-WI

On 17 December 1944, the 124th Cavalry Regiment Special started its march to Mong-Wi, Burma, marching in three serials. The order of march was 1st, 2d and 3d Squadrons with Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Troop marching with the 2d Squadron. The formation used in the 2d Squadron was column of files. The column was organized with the I and R and Kachin platoons operating in front of the main body by an hour's march, followed by the war dogs, the point, advance party, advance guard, and lastly the (9) Personal knowledge; (10) Personal knowledge.

main body. The terrain over which the regiment marched in the following weeks was mountainous and covered with jungle. In the Schweli River area the hills were choppy and steep. On some days, as on 3 January 1945, the 2d Squadron marched only eight miles, all of which was up hill. The average gradient was 12% and it was found necessary after this march to let each troop set its own pace on the steeper gradients and when marching in mud. (11) The march schedule would generally evolve itself into marching five or ten minutes, halting for a minute, and continuing on, taking either a five- or ten-minute rest in each hour. Marching on these precipitous trails was strenuous and exhausting and required the utmost in physical endurance.

On 12 January 1945, the 2d Squadron arrived at Mong-Wi, Burma, where the entire Mars Task Force was being assembled. During the march from Camp Landis to Mong-Wi, the 2d Squadron had marched a distance of 228 miles in twenty marching days, averaging 11.4 miles per day. (See Map D) (12)

MISSION OF MARS TASK FORCE

At Mong-Wi the Mars Task Force was given the mission of capturing the high hill masses surrounding the Namhpakka-Hosi Valley west of the Burma Road. This valley would give the force a valley suitable for supply and evacuation purposes and would furnish positions from which operations could be conducted to cut the Japanese lines of communications, to destroy their installations, block their escape routes, and further the over-all mission of the NCAC. (At this time the Chinese 22d, 30th, and 38th Divisions were in the vicinity of Namkham pushing south.) (See Map D) (13)

MARCH TO NAMHPAKKA-HOSI VALLEY

The 1st and 3d Squadrons of the 124th Cavalry Regiment Special moved out on 15 and 16 January 1945. The 2d Squadron was delegated to stay (11) Personal knowledge; (12) Personal knowledge; (13) Personal knowledge and A-4, p. 133.

behind with the brigade forward echelon as guard and reserve. (14) It was necessary to insure that the air strip at Mong-Wi be held until such time as the main part of the Mars Task Force had reached its objectives.

On 19 January 1945, the 2d Squadron pulled in all trail blocks that had been established and with brigade headquarters attached, started moving to join the rest of the regiment. The squadron marched over mountain ranges rising to an elevation of 7400 feet and on 29 January 1945, it started the last leg of its march into its battle position. "Tokyo Rose", a few days later broadcast that American paratroopers had dropped to this roadside position behind their lines. The Japs had not believed the march possible. (15)

THE SQUADRON SITUATION

On 28 January 1945, the day before the 2d Squadron reached Namhpakka-Hosi Valley, the squadron commander dispatched his adjutant and one section of the I and R Platoon to procure information and to act as a quartering party to guide the squadron into its exact area of employment. As the squadron started down into the valley in column of files from Man Ning, it was brought under sporadic artillery fire. This shelling lasted for about ten minutes when supporting artillery from the 613th Field Artillery Battalion began delivering counter-battery fire. Even though the squadron was stretched out over two miles, there were no casualties from this shelling, primarily because the trail was on the side of a steep slope and had numerous turns which provided cover. Most of the shells exploded above or below the trail. (See Map E)

✓ The 2d Squadron moved into the valley the morning of 29 January 1945. The squadron commander went forward to the Regimental CP to contact the 2d Squadron adjutant and the regimental commander. There he was issued a warning order to be prepared to attack, further details as to time and place were to be sent to him later. Other than that he received very (14) A-2, p. 135; (15) A-2, p. 139.

little information except that the 2d Squadron was to be placed in the general area of Troop B. He also learned that the 2d Squadron adjutant was not present and that he had left earlier that morning for the 1st Squadron area to watch Troop A make an attack. Meanwhile Troop A, commanded by Major William A. Locke (then Captain) had launched one of the most successful attacks of the campaign against a Jap-held hill where 34 Japanese were killed against two killed and seven wounded in Troop A. (16)

Moving toward the general area formerly occupied by Troop B, the squadron commander met Lieutenant Colonel Ripstra, 1st Squadron Commander, and learned the entire situation. Troop B had been moved to the left of Troop A. Troop C was several miles to the rear, and the 1st Squadron's defense was thinly held with very little depth. There was approximately a 200 yard gap in a draw between the 1st and 3d Squadrons' positions. It was obvious that the 1st Squadron needed support to hold newly won positions. (See Map E) (17)

After discussing the tactical situation with Lieutenant Colonel Ripstra, the 2d Squadron Commander made his estimate of the situation and issued an order to employ Troop F between the 1st and 3d Squadrons; Troop E 200 yards to the rear of the 1st Squadron to protect the flanks and the rear of the 1st Squadron; and Troop G was given the dual mission of establishing a trail block and protecting the air drop zone, which was a critical area and vital to the very existence of the command. The seven mortars of the 2d Squadron were employed under squadron control and placed in a draw behind Troop F and 3d Squadron. The mortars were registered and concentrations planned to the front of 1st Squadron, Troop F and the flanks of Troops E and G. (See Map E) (18)

At about 1600 the same day, the adjutant of the 2d Squadron arrived at the CP and was asked by the squadron commander to account for his actions

(16) Personal knowledge, Statement of Major William A. Locke on 29 January 1945; (17, 18) Personal knowledge.

during the past five hours. The adjutant replied that he had been watching Troop A make their attack. Irrked at his nonchalance toward the mission he had been given, the squadron commander informed him that he was relieved as adjutant because he had disregarded his duty and directed him to find himself a new home. (19)

About 1700 a wounded Japanese prisoner (the second of two prisoners captured by the Regiment) was brought by the 2d Squadron CP. During interrogation, the prisoner revealed that the 1st Squadron would be attacked twice that night in an attempt to dislodge it from its newly won positions.

At 2115, 29 January 1945, the Japanese opened up their first attack of estimated company strength with mortars, machine gun fire and grenades from a draw northeast of the positions of the 1st Squadron. It was during this attack that the lines of sound-powered telephones running from the observer to the gun positions in the 1st Squadron were knocked out. Lieutenant Purdy, 1st Squadron S-3, contacted the 2d Squadron and asked for supporting mortar fire. As soon as the request was received, all seven mortars opened up on prearranged targets. The mortar fire came in close to the front line troops of the 1st Squadron and was very instrumental in breaking up the enemy attack in A and B Troop sectors which had received the brunt of the attack. (See Map E) Excitement ran high in the anticipation of the second attack. The night was chilly, but not as cold as it seemed. Beads of perspiration stood out on the brows of most of the men. Everyone was anxiously awaiting the attack, wondering "From what direction, whose sector, what strength?" It wasn't long until these questions were answered.

At 0015, 30 January 1945, a second attack was made by the Japanese from the same draw and the same direction, but it lacked the punch needed (19) Personal knowledge.

and was soon broken up by concentrations of mortar fire and machine gun fire.

At 0100, 30 January 1945, a request again came from S-3 of the 1st Squadron asking that the 2d Squadron commit a troop to dislodge the enemy from a draw into which it had withdrawn. The 2d Squadron Commander pointed out that there would be no particular advantage in jumping off into an attack since the enemy had taken no positions and the advantage in this situation certainly was with the defender.

At 0130, 30 January 1945, regimental headquarters notified the 2d Squadron Commander to attach one troop to support the 1st Squadron at daybreak. A guide would be sent from regimental headquarters to move the designated troop into position. Troop E was given this mission. (See Map E)

At daybreak the same morning, the guide (who happened to be the adjutant relieved from the 2d Squadron the day before) met Troop E and guided it to its position, which was on B Troop's exposed left flank. From the information received the night before it appeared that Troop E would have to fight to relieve the pressure on B Troop's flank; but when Troop E arrived at its new position, there was no enemy present. Troop E started digging in.

RECONNAISSANCE

Early the morning of 30 January 1945, the 2d Squadron received an overlay type order showing its objective. The day of attack was tentatively scheduled for 31 January 1945; the time was to be designated by the squadron commander. The hill mass which was the objective formed a ridge that was 1600 - 2000 yards east and northeast of the 2d Squadron front lines. The hill was covered with scrubby oak and dry grass. From a map study, the hill appeared to be about 1400 yards in length and 800 yards in width. Even though there was good observation from a hill occupied by

the 3d Squadron, it was very difficult to determine the exact nature of the terrain.

The 2d Squadron Commander started on a reconnaissance, taking with him the 2d Squadron S-3, the weapons platoon commander, a radio operator, and two messengers. No sooner had the party arrived on the forward slope of the hill occupied by the 3d Squadron than the Japanese greeted it with seven salvos of 77-mm artillery fire. The party immediately took cover in nearby fox holes of soldiers from Troop L. It was now apparent why the 77-mm gun was called the "whizz-bang", since all that could be heard from the weapon was the "whizz" of the projectile coming in, then a terrific bang. If a person heard the bang, he had reason to assume that he was safe.

The party remained in the forward-slope hill position of 3d Squadron observing and studying the terrain and then moved along the front lines toward Troop F. As the party neared Troop F it was again brought under fire from the same Japanese 77-mm guns, but fortunately no one was hit.

At Troop F the squadron commander talked with Lieutenant Knight, Troop Commander, and learned that during the night there had been an unusual amount of truck movement out to his front; furthermore, the Japanese could be heard cutting trees. From this information it could be assumed that the Japanese were reinforcing their positions as well as re-supplying. Lieutenant Knight also stated that during the previous night his troop had not fired a shot as it had been quiet along his front but that all "hell" had broken loose to his left.

While the squadron commander was at the F Troop CP, American C-47's, flying through the draw over Troop F to re-supply at the drop zone were receiving rifle and machine gun fire from Japanese positions to the front. (It was on one of these occasions that the Air Corps reported six of their planes riddled and one of their kickers killed.) (20) It was impossible (20) A-2, p. 180.

to pick up any smoke or flash from the concealed positions of the Japanese in the jungle growth beyond F Troop and only the distinctive crack of their machine gun fire could be heard. It is felt that much of the fire placed on the C-47's could have been eliminated if the air liaison officer had but notified the pilots of the situation and advised them to approach the drop field over friendly lines rather than flying low over enemy-held positions. (21)

The 2d Squadron Commander and party continued from F Troop CP on to A Troop's position and arrived there just in time to see a platoon from Troop C moving out on reconnaissance to determine exact location of Japanese positions. The patrol moved straight out from A Troop's front lines in column of two's with two officers leading. The patrol moved about 75 yards when it drew fire from "nambus" (Japanese light machine guns) of the Japanese defensive positions. One of the officers was hit and the other one stayed with him. The machine guns from the 1st Squadron immediately engaged the Japanese guns in a brisk fire fight which lasted several minutes before fire superiority was gained and firing ceased. The patrol returned without the two officers. It was learned from the men in the patrol that one of the officers had been hit on the initial burst of fire and that the other officer had stayed with him ordering the patrol to return. The body of one of the officers was later recovered; the body of the other was never found. (See Map E)

The 2d Squadron Commander went from Troop A on into Troop E positions and inspected the dispositions of troops. As a result of this inspection, the Squadron Commander sent a message to have Troop G occupy E Troop's old position since it was felt that from this new position Troop G could better support both Troops E and F.

The Squadron Commander and party then returned to the 2d Squadron CP
(21) A-2, p. 180.

and it was learned that orders from Regiment had been received that the attack scheduled for 31 January 1945, would be delayed until 2 February 1945. The reason given for the delay was to allow more time to clear all casualties from the portable surgical hospital prior to the big attack. Postponement of the attack allowed all unit commanders more time for further reconnaissance and planning.

A request was made by the Squadron S-3 through the air liaison officer at Regiment for an air strike on the objective using napalm bombs. This request was denied since all aircraft had been allotted for other missions. A request for the use of an L-5 plane to fly over the assigned objective was also made, but this request was also denied as no planes were available.

During the night of 30 January 1945, the 2d Squadron received intermittent artillery fire. Japanese patrols were active firing with their nambus machine guns attempting to draw fire and feel out positions of Troops E, F, and G. About all that was accomplished by these nuisance raids was to interfere with the men's sleep.

On 31 January 1945, further reconnaissance was made by the 2d Squadron Commander and his staff of the high ground east of Mong-Noi. Major How Chau Wen, 2d Battalion, 89th Regiment, 30th Division, New 1st Chinese Army was contacted and the disposition of his Chinese troops were pointed out. Meanwhile a section of the I and R Platoon was sent on patrol to the front of Troop F with the mission of locating disposition of enemy weapons and positions. It was while the squadron commander and his staff were on reconnaissance here that two Japanese were spotted at a range of about 300 yards. The squadron commander was armed with a carbine and didn't fire since it was doubtful whether the Japs could be hit at that range and to have fired on them would have disclosed his position. The party then moved on to the high ground in the area where they could get a better view of the objective.

THE 2D SQUADRON PLAN OF ATTACK

The squadron commander, after deliberation, arrived at a decision and formulated a tentative plan for the attack of the objective. The two courses of action open to the squadron commander were: (1) to make a frontal attack through 1st Squadron, or (2) to make a withdrawal from present positions to the northeast and envelop the enemy on the enemy's right flank. The latter plan was decided upon. The troop commanders were called forward to a vantage point from which the objective could be seen and the following oral order was issued: (See Map F)

1. "Enemy estimated to be a weak, understrength company occupy that hill. Disposition of the 1st and 3d Squadrons are known to you. 2d Battalion, 89th Regiment, (Chinese) occupy the area to our right and rear.

2. "The 2d Squadron attacks 020620 February 1945, and will capture that high hill with bare spot on top.

3. "Troop F will be on the right, Troop G on the left. Troop E will capture this high ground prior to 020620 February 1945, and be ready to support the attack initially by fire and continue the attack on order.

a. "Line of departure will be that draw over which that fence cuts diagonally.

b. "All mortars will be under squadron control.

c. "The Machine Gun Platoon is attached to Troop E. I and R Platoon will maintain a screen along the high ground to insure that no enemy ambushes are set up in this area prior to the attack and will send out patrols to determine whether or not that ground is occupied.

d. "The 613th Field Artillery will support the attack.

- e. "The 1st Squadron will make a feint to attack at 0600 and in addition will send a combat patrol down that trail.
 - f. "The 2d Battalion, 89th Chinese Regiment will support by machine gun fire to right of our objective.
 - g. "Plan for reorganization is for Troop F to turn right and dig in on the west slope of the crest of the hill. Troop G will turn left and dig in on the east slope of the crest. Troop E will come up the center toward the crest and tie in with Troop F on its right and Troop G on its left.
- 4. "Administrative details will be issued later in the complete written order.
 - 5. "The Squadron GP will be in Mong-Noi. Radio silence from now on until H hour minus five. It is now 1400. Any questions?" (22)

After the oral order was issued to the troop commanders, Troop E was directed to send a platoon to establish an ambush on the Mong-Noi - Hpa-pen trail 500 yards southeast of Mong-Noi, as Japanese had been reported moving on this trail. This platoon of Troop E was reinforced by a section of heavy machine guns. The forward echelon of the 2d Squadron GP moved to Mong-Noi late the afternoon of 31 January 1945. (23)

The platoon of Troop E established its ambush and during the night of 31 January 1945, received mortar fire which was believed to have been from mortars of the 1st Squadron. Fragments of shells which were examined the next morning verified this assumption and indicated that they were American mortar shells. The 2d Squadron S-3 was directed to coordinate (22, 23) Personal knowledge.

with 1st Squadron and to let 1st Squadron know of the trail block which had been established by the 2d Squadron. During the night of 31 January - 1 February 1945, there was the usual Japanese night activity of skirting around the perimeter and of firing their light machine guns. Intermittent artillery fire fell during the night on G Troop positions, resulting in several casualties in the troop. (See Map F) (24)

PREPARATION FOR ATTACK

On 1 February 1945, preparations for the attack continued. Supply installations and dumps were established near Mong-Noi. The 2d Squadron S-2 established an OP on the high ground north of the objective hill. As soon as it was established it received several direct hits from Japanese artillery. This necessitated construction of another OP that night. The one which had been destroyed was set up as a dummy OP. The 252d Quartermaster pack troop moved up with ammunition loads for the squadron ammunition supply point and continued to make preparations in packing ammunition so it would be ready to push its mule trains forward with the attacking troops. Information was received from Regimental Headquarters 1 February 1945, that the 114th Chinese Regiment would attack 020620 February 1945, on the left of the 2d Squadron and drive toward Sao-pong. This information was encouraging inasmuch as Troop G would not have to worry about its left flank.

To complicate matters further, the 2d Squadron S-3 showed the squadron commander a written message that had arrived for information of all concerned from Colonel Willis J. Tack, Chief of Staff of the Brigade, which in substance stated that the theater stock of 81-mm ammunition HE (light) was exhausted. The artillery liaison officer had just notified the 2d Squadron Commander that the 613th Field Artillery Battalion was also low on artillery ammunition. (25)

(24, 25) Personal knowledge.

The I and R Platoon had spotted a few positions on its reconnaissance patrol in the valley. Artillery fire was called for and placed on the approximate locations of the Japanese positions. Whether this artillery fire was effective was not determined.

By noon 1 February 1945, all plans had been completed for a coordinated attack. The fire support plan called for artillery concentrations on positions in front of the 1st Squadron at 0600 and on the objective hill at H-5. The 2d Squadron mortars and machine guns were to open up H-2. The 2d Battalion, Chinese 89th Regiment, was to support the attack with machine guns also. The aid station was moved to Mong-Noi and established near an American portable surgical hospital which was supporting the Chinese 89th Regiment. This insured early treatment of casualties. Arrangements were made for use of the Regimental I and R Platoon as an evacuation team under Captain J.V.H. Davis. (26)

The night of 1 February 1945, the village of Mong-Noi was shelled by Japanese artillery and several native thatched huts were set afire. These huts, which were constructed of bamboo, literally exploded and the entire area was illuminated for several minutes with the same brilliance as if flares had been used.

THE WITHDRAWAL

The platoon from Troop E which had established the ambush rejoined its troop and with it occupied the high ground about 1100 yards east of Mong-Noi by 012000 February 1945. Troop E was now in position to support the attack by fire. (See Map F)

Shortly after dark 1 February 1945, Troop G quietly moved from its position behind 1st Squadron into an assembly area southeast of Mong-Noi. In the early morning of 2 February 1945, Troop F withdrew from its positions between the 1st and 3d Squadrons into an assembly area. This difficult night maneuver which involved a withdrawal from the perimeter was executed (26) Personal knowledge.

by F and G Troops over deceptive wooded terrain in a skillful manner. Prior planning, reconnaissance, training, and leadership were the contributing factors in its successful execution. (See Map F)

At 020600 February 1945, the 1st Squadron sent a patrol up the draw to the left of its position with the mission of attracting the attention of the enemy. At the same time, the 1st Squadron opened up with a heavy volume of fire feinting an attack to its immediate front. The 2d Battalion of the 89th Chinese Regiment gave fire support with machine gun fire from their position, firing to the right of the 2d Squadron's objective. At H-5, supporting artillery fire from the 613th Field Artillery Battalion opened up, and radio communication was established on the SCR 300. (27)

THE ATTACK

Meanwhile, in the attack area everyone anxiously awaited H hour. Excitement mounted and the men nervously made last minute inspections of weapons, ammunition, and equipment. A few men finished putting an edge of razor sharpness on their trench knives. The situation was tense, for every soldier knew the stage was set; this is what they had trained for; this was no dry run; this was it. This would be a "dog eat dog" fight. Even though the policy in the 2d Squadron was to take prisoners, everyone sensed a feeling in his heart that there would be none taken. Both sides realized that this "game" was for keeps.

The weather in that early dawn of 2 February 1945, was cold and clear; visibility was good except for a haze which clung several feet above the ground. At 020620 February 1945, F and G Troops crossed the line of departure; Troop E, with its four attached machine guns, supported the attack from its position. "As skirmishers" formation was used by Troops F and G with two platoons forward and one back as they crossed the line of departure. The Chinese 114th Regiment did not jump off as scheduled. (28)

(27, 28) Personal knowledge.

This left G Troop's left flank exposed. The 2d Squadron Commander with his S-3 and party were in the OP anxiously awaiting information. (See Map F)

Troop F moved rapidly and in approximately 35 minutes was near the top of the objective. During the approach Troop F encountered only one Japanese officer and one soldier in the draw. Lieutenant Hyatt, F Troop Executive Officer, was wounded by a grenade thrown by the Jap officer before he and the Jap soldier were shot down. (29)

Lieutenant Knight, F Troop Commander, called on the SCR 300 stating, "Other than those two Japs, looks like there's nothing up here." The 2d Squadron Commander directed him to turn to his right and start digging in as previously planned. It was at this time that Lieutenant Knight came upon two pillboxes, which he grenaded. Then he called back to his men, "Come up, there's a whole nest of them." Lieutenant Knight moved into the center of a group of mutually supporting emplacements, throwing grenades into the openings and firing his carbine when he could. He was initially wounded from enemy grenades and fire, but kept on fighting and shouting encouragement to his men from where he lay. A few minutes later he was killed. For his actions he was awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor. This was the only one awarded in the CBI Theater.

Curtis Knight, 1st Sergeant of F Troop, jumped in to assist his brother and was wounded by a bullet under the heart. (30) All of F Troop kept slugging it out with the enemy who were dug into a strong mutually supporting reverse slope position. The position was built up around a series of bunkers, manned with machine guns, fox holes, and trenches and was well concealed and developed in depth.

The platoons of F Troop continued to close in and were subjected to grenades, mortar fire, and machine gun fire. The 613th Field Artillery and the 2d Squadron's mortars did succeed in silencing to a degree the enemy (29) Personal knowledge; (30) A-2, p. 193.

mortars located south of the objective. In general, each position had to be overcome. Corporal Hill of Troop F fired his bazooka (rocket launcher) at one of these bunker positions. Two of the shells did not detonate, so he threw away the bazooka and charged the position. He jumped into the bunker and killed a Japanese officer and an enlisted man with his knife. F Troop succeeded in taking its objective through the courage and boldness of its officers and men. All officers in Troop F were either killed or wounded, and three were decorated for gallantry in action.

During the entire time firing could be heard in the G Troop sector, but no message had come in on the SCR 300. Throughout the morning of 2 February 1945, there was constant interference and noise in radio reception. The 2d Squadron Commander, using information received from Troop F, decided to displace Troop E forward from its position. The E Troop commander was directed to move up the center and to tie in with Troop F on the right. A new reserve was immediately reconstituted from the I and R Platoon and from all available men that could be found.

About 020700 February 1945, the 2d Squadron OP started receiving intensive artillery fire from Japanese 77-mm guns which were firing from concealed positions north of the objective. This fire was continuous throughout the morning with close ones hitting near the OP, but the major part of the fire fell on the old OP which had been set up as a dummy. On one occasion, when some of their salvos were coming within twenty or thirty yards of the OP, the 2d Squadron Commander was sending a message to the executive officer asking for more ammunition for the front line troops. The executive officer asked, "Did they get you?" The squadron commander answered, "No, but it was damn close." Japanese artillery fire immediately grew in intensity. Apparently the Japanese had people who understood English and were monitoring the net. (31)

At about 021030 February 1945, the 2d Squadron Commander received his (31) Personal knowledge.

first message from Captain Wood, G Troop Commander, in which he stated his forward observer and radio operator from the 613th Field Artillery Battalion had been killed and that Troop G needed artillery support. The squadron commander told him to use his radio and call for artillery fire through the artillery liaison officer, Captain Robert B. Compton, and that he would have to adjust his own fire. In short order, this arrangement for calling for artillery fire was made.

Captain Wood sent another message stating that Troop G was dangerously low on ammunition and that they would have to be re-supplied before they could attack again. G Troop was quickly re-supplied with ammunition since Lieutenant Cornwall, Executive Officer of Troop G was up close with the ammunition mules. The squadron commander notified G Troop Commander that one platoon from Troop E with a section of machine guns would be attached to him to support his attack. This platoon with a section of machine guns was set up on the right flank of the enemy and gave flanking fire support for G Troop. (32)

At 021200 February 1945, G Troop jumped off with excellent artillery supporting fire, and by 1235 it had captured the objective in its sector. Troop G in its attack ran into the same type of positions as had Troop F. In overcoming these bunker positions, bazookas as well as artillery were effectively used. (33)

Since the supply of artillery ammunition was short, the 613th Field Artillery Battalion found it necessary to conserve on HE ammunition and fire a number of concentrations with white phosphorus shells. It was on one of these occasions that part of these phosphorus shells fell on the southwest slope of the hill and started a brush and grass fire. The wind, which was blowing from the west, pushed the fire and smoke right through E and F Troop positions. Some Japs who were still in this area jumped up (32, 33) Personal knowledge.

and ran into the troops' positions only to be shot down. Troop E was not aware of the situation and for a moment believed it was receiving a counterattack, but fortunately it wasn't.

REORGANIZATION

Reorganization started immediately and Troops E, F, and G were disposed according to plan. Since all officers in Troop F had either been wounded or killed, Lieutenant Julian Ward, the I and R Platoon leader, was placed temporarily in command of F Troop. Evacuation continued over difficult terrain from the front lines to the aid station and on to the portable surgical hospital in Mong-Noi. Chinese from the 2d Battalion, 89th Regiment, assisted in evacuating the wounded from the portable surgical hospital to the air strip. The distance from the front lines to the portable surgical hospital was approximately a mile, and from the hospital to the air strip, three miles. (34)

Ironically, one of the first men to be evacuated was Captain J.V.H. Davis, the 2d Squadron adjutant, who had been placed in charge of the evacuation team which was formed from the Regimental I and R Platoon. Captain Davis was wounded in the arm, chest, and legs while performing his duty. (35)

At 021230 February 1945, the 3d Squadron launched a successful attack to secure critical terrain forward of its position, and this assisted in relieving the pressure which was being put on the 2d Squadron by enemy artillery and mortar fire. (36)

RESULTS

The mission of the 2d Squadron was completed 021235 February 1945. The battle had been won through the sheer boldness and aggressiveness of every individual fighting man. The cost of taking this terrain was 25 killed and 79 wounded. (37) The importance of the 2d Squadron objective as an observation post and as the key terrain of this area was not realized (34, 35, 36, 37) Personal knowledge.

until the objective had been taken. From this hill the disposition of the task force, even to include ^{the} Regimental, Battalion, Squadron CP^s, as well as gun positions, could be seen in detail.

On 5 February 1945, it was announced on an American radio broadcast from Chungking, China, that a unit of the Mars Task Force had broken the resistance of the Burma Road block. On 18 February 1945, Lord Louis Mountbatten spoke to the 2d Squadron and, as a gesture of goodwill, told the Squadron that the hill over which they had fought would in the future appear on all British maps as Knight's Hill. (38)

The combat mission of the NGAC was completed in April 1945. The Japanese Army had been driven from northern and central Burma and land communication with China was re-established. (39)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it is my opinion that the decision to use long range penetration units in Burma was a sound one. The establishment of a road block at Namhpakka-Hosi along the important Burma Road cut the enemy's supply lines and forced him to withdraw.

Since the Mars Task Force had air superiority, its units were able to move freely over jungle trails deep in the enemy's rear and to attack the enemy's main supply arteries. Supply by air made this operation possible and importance can best be shown by the following figures:

N 130
"In a 27-day period of intense combat, from 17 January 1945 through 12 February 1945, over 91.31 tons of supplies were delivered daily to the Mars Task Force whose average strength was 6900 officers and enlisted men and 2400 animals." (40)

Thus by air superiority the Mars Task Force was not dependent upon ground supply lines as were the Japanese.

Of equal importance was an efficient communication system by which

(38) Personal knowledge; (39) A-5, p. 9 and 59; (40) A-5, p. 43

units were able to request supplies and supporting fire, control the maneuver of units, and transmit orders. Because it had an efficient communication system, maintained through SCR 300 radios, the 2d Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment Special was able to assist the 1st Squadron in repulsing two Japanese counterattacks the night of 29/30 January 1945.

The training and preparation for the arduous march to Namhpakka-Hosi Valley paid dividends. There were relatively few march casualties primarily because the men were in excellent physical condition and were able to negotiate terrain which the Japanese considered impassable. The appearance of the Mars Task Force along the Burma Road caused the Japanese much concern over the operation of this force on one of its supply corridors. The natives in the Kachin Platoon were invaluable in acting as guides over jungle trails and unfamiliar terrain.

In analyzing the attacks made by the Japanese on the perimeter the night of 29 January 1945, a number of important points stand out. The Japanese prisoner which was taken by the 1st Squadron gave accurate information relative to the Japanese attacks. This emphasizes the point that prisoners are an important source of information. Because of information learned from the prisoner, the 2d Squadron was able to assist the 1st Squadron in repulsing the attacks by proper location of its mortars. The result of efficient training and discipline was displayed by the men of Troop F when they held their fire while Troops A and B were being attacked, thereby conserving ammunition and concealing their position.

In studying the preparation, the withdrawal, and the attack on Knight's Hill, the principles of current doctrine should again be re-emphasized. As thorough a reconnaissance as possible was made by all unit commanders. A more complete reconnaissance could have been made over this deceptive terrain had the request for the use of L-5 planes been granted. The plan adopted was coordinated with the 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment Special

and the 2d Battalion, 89th Chinese Regiment, and through that coordination the maximum use of all supporting weapons was made.

The withdrawal of Troops E, F, and G from front line positions was efficiently executed because detailed reconnaissance had been made and every measure was taken to conceal their movement. The boldness and aggressiveness shown by officers and enlisted men of F and G Troops made the attack on Knight's Hill successful. Even though all officers in F Troop were either killed or wounded, noncommissioned officers and enlisted men took command and by their sheer "intestinal fortitude" clung to the objective despite punishing enemy fire. It is my belief that this "esprit de corps" was instilled into the units through leadership and thorough training and discipline on the part of the troop commanders and platoon leaders.

The element of surprise was achieved by the 2d Squadron as to the direction of attack. This fact is confirmed by the amount of resistance encountered by the 1st Squadron as it made its feint attack, which helped conceal the advance of the 2d Squadron.

It is felt that more artillery and mortar fire could have been used in the preparatory fire prior to the attack to completely saturate the objective; however, at the time, it was logistically impossible since Colonel Tack, in his message to the 2d Squadron, indicated that the theater stock of HE 81-mm mortar ammunition was exhausted. The position of the 2d Squadron could have become critical and its units subjected to numerous counterattacks had the enemy been aware of the existing ammunition shortage.

The objective assigned the 2d Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment Special could easily have been assigned as a regimental objective since the hill was about 1500 yards long and 800 yards wide. The total authorized strength of a cavalry squadron was 638 enlisted men and at no time in the operation

was the 2d Squadron ever up to this strength. It is my opinion that casualties in the 2d Squadron could have been considerably reduced had the request for napalm bombs been granted, as two well-placed bombs on the Japanese entrenchments would have either killed or forced the Japs out and exposed their position. This was exemplified to a certain extent when the fire set off by the white phosphorus shells swept through F Troop's position and flushed out a number of Japs. The failure of the Chinese 114th Regiment to attack as scheduled left the 2d Squadron's left flank exposed and gave the squadron a false sense of security.

It is not necessary to emphasize the importance of supporting artillery in this attack; but one important lesson was brought out in Troop G when the attached forward observer and radio operator from the 613th Field Artillery Battalion were both killed, necessitating the G Troop commander to adjust his own artillery fire before continuing the attack. High casualties among forward observers can be expected in combat when they advance with the assaulting troops. Therefore, it is my opinion that all ground force officers should be given thorough training in the adjustment of artillery fire, especially since artillery procedures have been simplified. This training would eliminate delays in pressing the attack.

A commander, in order to make correct decisions must be provided with current essential elements of information. In this operation, the 2d Squadron Commander could have very well used aerial photographs which pin-pointed Japanese strong-points.

The strength of the Japanese in the area was underestimated. The S-2, Regimental Headquarters, 124th Cavalry Special was notified of the increased movement of trucks and the cutting of trees in front of Troop F on the nights of 29/30 January 1945. This information properly evaluated should have been sufficient to indicate that the enemy was reinforcing and

would attempt to stop the advance of the Mars Task Force. Documents removed from the Japanese dead revealed that the unit attacked was part of the Japanese 168th Regiment, 49th Division, conquerors of Singapore. The location of this enemy unit in the order of battle had been lost for several months.

The enemy had a strong reverse slope position on Knight's Hill. Very little opposition was encountered by Troop F until it cleared the crest of the hill, then concealed automatic weapons came to life. Troops must ever be aware of the possibility of strong defensive positions on reverse slopes of prominent terrain.

The importance of Knight's Hill could be fully realized after it was taken. From this hill the disposition of units of the Mars Task Force could be seen and it was from here the enemy had both observation and the capability of placing artillery fire upon the 3d Squadron, 1st Squadron, 612th and 613th Field Artillery Battalions, and the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 475th Infantry Regiment.

In the 2d Squadron attack, the mule trains moved closely behind the attacking troops. During the attack when G Troop called for more ammunition, the re-supply was quickly effected because the ammunition mules were well forward.

In my opinion, a collecting company should have been provided early in the campaign for the evacuation of casualties from the battlefield. The 511th Collecting Company was attached to the task force after the main fighting had ended and this company could have been efficiently utilized in the attack on Knight's Hill. The fighting efficiency of the 2d Squadron was reduced at a time when it was most needed because men from the troops had to assist the regimental I and R Platoon in evacuating casualties.

Last, but far from least, the 2d Squadron Commander can be criticized for carelessness in the transmission of radio messages in the clear. His

comment on the artillery fire coming in at the 2d Squadron OP was unnecessary.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the lessons emphasized by this operation are:

- ✓ 1. In all combat, every effort should be made to gain surprise.
- ✓ 2. No terrain ^{should be considered to be} is impassable.
- ✓ 3. In a night withdrawal secrecy, control, and detailed reconnaissance
are very important factors.
- ✓ 4. In making a withdrawal at night while in contact, every measure
must be taken to conceal the movement.
- ✓ 5. All ground force officers should receive training in the adjust-
ment of artillery fire.
- ✓ 6. The value of artillery support is immeasurable and should be
used even though it is sometimes impracticable to use other than pack
artillery.
- ✓ 7. White phosphorus shells can often be used to a great advantage in
burning out an area to expose enemy positions.
- ✓ 8. It is essential to deny the enemy observation and the capability
of placing direct fire upon the battle position.
- ✓ 9. Air superiority enables units to move freely in enemy territory
without depending upon ground supply lines.
- ✓ 10. Aerial photographs should be provided commanders, when possible,
pin-pointing known positions.
- ✓ 11. Liaison planes should be made available to, ^{an} commander for
reconnaissance purposes when possible.
- ✓ 12. Prisoners are an important source of information and should be
taken.
13. Continuous efforts must be made by all S-2's and G-2's to insure
identification and location of enemy units, so as to provide commanders

✓ with necessary information.

✓ 14. Units must be on guard against strong enemy defense positions on reverse slopes.

✓ 15. Units should be assigned objectives proportionate only to their capabilities.

✓ 16. Mortars ^{should} must be positioned so they can fire barrages and concentrations in support of defensive positions.

✓ 17. Promiscuous firing must be avoided to prevent premature disclosure of positions.

✓ 18. Units should seldom be committed into an operation without adequate medical support for evacuation of casualties.

✓ 19. Ammunition in sufficient quantities to insure continuous fire support in the attack should be provided.

✓ 20. Where wheeled transportation is not available and animal transport is utilized, pack trains with ammunition must move forward with the attack.

✓ 21. All commanders should control the use of radio and transmission of messages in the clear.

✓ 22. Trained natives are invaluable as guides in operations over unfamiliar terrain.

✓ 23. Men must be in excellent physical condition in mountainous operations.